

THE
HOUR OF PRAYER,

OR

A Year at the Union Prayer Meeting.

A DISCOURSE

WHEREIN IS GIVEN SOME ACCOUNT OF

THE UNION PRAYER MEETING,

HELD IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, (GREEN & GERMAN STS.)

Baltimore, Maryland.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the Temple at the Hour of Prayer."
— "And they were all with one accord in one place."

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A MEMORIAL OF PRAYER.

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace, day nor night.—Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."—ISAIAH 62,—6, 7.

"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake will I not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."—ISAIAH, 62,—1.

"A Year at the Union Prayer Meeting!"—How many delightful remembrances do these words awake in our minds!—Fifty-two weeks of daily association around the altars of Praise and Prayer!—What precious memories of Christian intercourse, of united supplication before the mercy seat, of deepest heartfelt interest in behalf of the Church of God and of a dying world, hover all along the pathway of these days of the months of our Year of Prayer.—Surely, speaking from the record of experience, we may say the Hour of Prayer has sanctified the day, the day has sanctified the week, the weeks have sanctified the Year, and the Year of Union Prayer has been the sanctified Sabbath of our Christian Life.

This, Brethren beloved in the Lord, has been a new thing in our History as Disciples of a Common and Blessed Master. Not that Prayer is a new thing; not that United Prayer is a new thing; not that Daily Public Prayer is a new thing, though continued with increasing interest for the space of a twelve month; for it is not. Daily Public Prayer was the custom of the Old Testament Church, and has always been perpetuated in the christian church; but to us, in the peculiar circumstances in which we have met and in the peculiar interest which has attended these services, as Union ser-

vices, under the direction of the laity of the church, it has been, I think I may say, a new thing, and the past year constitutes an epoch in the development and history of our Christian Life. Many will date from it the era of the attainment of a higher type of Christian character and of a higher standard of Christian consecration and action; and for that reason, whatever is to be the History of these services in the future, for the past, in their relation to our Christian life, they must ever hold in our memories a place peculiar and sacred. I am well assured, I speak from the experience of many and know I ought to speak from that of all, when I say that this hallowed Hour of Prayer has daily visited us, fraught with the most precious blessings to our souls. The fragrance of the "precious ointment" of Christian Love, poured forth of the Holy Ghost, has often diffused its hallowed influence through our assemblies, and made us realize "How good and how pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity." That Grace diffused has been "like the Dew of Hermon upon the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded his Blessing, even life for evermore."—Whatever others, whose attendance has been interrupted and casual, may have experienced or have inferred, those whose attendance has been constant from the first, and there are many such, can testify for themselves of the preciousness of Christian union before the throne of Grace.—"*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us,—and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ.—And these things write we unto you that your Joy may be full.*"

It would seem well, my Brethren, not to permit the anniversary of this year of peculiar Christian privilege to pass entirely unnoticed, and I am the more unwilling that it should, since it pleased the Brethren of the Young Men's Christian Association, who have had the responsibility and charge of these services, to erect their altar of sacrifice *within these consecrated walls*, and to hallow *these courts* with the incense of Daily Prayer and Praise. They have expressed their gratitude that we granted them the privilege, but surely *ours*

should be the gratitude, since so great has been *our* privilege. If we have done only what was our duty in receiving Brethren in Christ, beloved for his sake, we have found our reward in that Grace which has rested upon us for their sake, and when they have come to us, with a word from the Lord or with an entreaty in our behalf, and in the behalf of a lost world, we have felt that they have left the blessing of the servants of the Most High behind them. If we have given, it has been "*given to us again, good measure, pressed down and running over*."

THE UNION PRAYER MEETING. I.—ITS HISTORY.

Having been in attendance upon these Union Services from their first opening in St. John's Church in Liberty street, and especially having had perfect understanding of all things connected with this meeting from the first, it has seemed good to me to undertake to set them forth somewhat in order in memorial of the mercy of God during the year.

Of the Union Services held Elsewhere.

Of the Union Services held *in other Churches and Halls*, whether under the auspices of the *Young Men's Christian Association*, or of the *Churches themselves*, in which they were respectively held, I need not here speak at length. The Record of Good wrought through their instrumentality is on high, and their influence is doubtless still felt, and will be in those Churches and neighborhoods where they were held. The many fervent prayers there offered from faithful hearts, are a grateful memorial before the mercy seat, and will continue the pledge of precious blessings to the Church of God.

Of the Union Services held in this Church.

These were by way of experiment at first held as a *morning* service. It proved to many that had been in attendance upon the afternoon services a grateful change. The quiet and the dewy freshness of the early morning hour seemed especially favorable to the spirit and appropriate to the work of

praise and prayer. From the first, these morning services were largely attended, and continued to be, until by the commencement of other like services at the same hour, the number at this meeting was somewhat diminished. Still until midsummer's heat had dispersed many of our regular attendants abroad in search of recreation and health, the number continued large, and the interest which was manifest from the beginning, although for a morning or so it may have seemed temporarily to languish, at no time permanently subsided.

During the heat of August and the oppression of September, notwithstanding the absence from the city of many who had been in attendance and some of those who had been most active in sustaining the meetings, they were still continued, and when at any time the question was started as to their suspension, there were always those who had been so deeply interested in and profited by them that they could not find it in their hearts to assent to the proposition ; and I doubt not that if the Young Men's Association, that noble band that had thus far sustained the services, had at any time withdrawn from their charge, there would have been others whose interest in the meeting would have necessitated its continuance. The Hour of United Prayer had become to them already so precious, that their hearts pleaded for its continued observance.

Upon the return of our citizens from their Summer vacations, the interest began manifestly to revive, and thus continued, until the pressure upon our men of business for a time deprived us of the presence and prayers of many of those who had been the firmest and most active friends of the meeting. Under this absence, the interest seemed again somewhat temporarily to abate, although at no time, even at the lowest ebb in the attendance, could those who had from the beginning experienced its refreshing influence, have consented to its suspension. Several times indeed, during the autumn, that question was brought before the meeting, but, in every instance, it served to show more and more clearly, the strength of the attachment of the Christian heart to this Hour of Prayer.

Meanwhile the hour of meeting had been changed to the afternoon. This change, while it excluded some who had been in constant attendance, secured the attendance of a much larger number, and again the attendance and the interest *greatly* revived. This continued until mid-winter, when it was most manifest that the Lord was visiting his People with the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit. The attendance both of God's people and of the Impenitent greatly increased.—The “spirit of grace and supplication” was poured remarkably and abundantly up on the people, and an earnest longing for the display of Divine Power in the salvation of the Impenitent was peculiarly and most impressively manifest, in the prayers and exhortations of the meetings. About this time the work of conversion became manifest in several different neighborhoods and Churches, and especially among certain classes which had been made the subjects of incessant Prayer. These glad tidings of the Lord's work in different Churches and localities in the city, greatly cheered the People of God, and encouraged them to increased fervency and faith in Intercession. About this time, our hearts were much cheered and encouraged by the presence and earnest exhortations of that devoted servant of God, the Rev. JOHN CHAMBERS of Philadelphia. His account of the wonderful work of God in that city, and his stirring appeals to the Brethren and the Impenitent served materially to increase that deeper interest which was already arising in connection with these services. During most of January and February, so great was the interest, that the rooms where the mid-day and the afternoon meetings were held, were crowded beyond their capacity, and many were unable to obtain admission. Manifestly the Spirit of the Lord was specially and most graciously present at this time. This could not for a moment be doubted by those who had anxiously watched the progress of these services from the beginning. The evidence of this was not seen so much in the fact of the multitudes that flocked daily to the House of Prayer, as in that earnest spirit of Intercession which was poured upon the People, and in that intense solicitude for the Impenitent which was so manifest.

About this time, the Union Services at Immanuel Church which had been suspended during the winter were resumed. This deprived us of the presence and the ardent exhortations of the beloved assistant Pastor of that Church, who now alas! stands, as the lone Standard Bearer of that bereft division of the army of Immanuel. This and the opening of other places in other neighborhoods for Union Prayer diminished considerably the attendance at this meeting, although still, and even to this time, the interest has by no means entirely abated.

Such, very cursorily stated, has been *the History of this, to those of us who have been in constant attendance, remarkable Year of Prayer.* None of us supposed, when this meeting began, that its own vitality would sustain it during the whole year; but, not only has it perpetuated itself for a twelvemonth, if we are not mistaken, it has already necessitated its continuance. The observance of the Hour of Prayer, has become to many of us a part of our Daily Life. Daily Duties as we believe have not suffered by that observance, and they have now arranged themselves into an entire accommodation and accordance with its demands. We believe ourselves not less faithful in their discharge than before, and we have acquired an additional hour for united supplication before God. May that Hour, so long as it shall be thus consecrated to Intercession by the people of God, be hallowed by the presence and grace of the Divine Spirit.

II.—ITS AMENITIES.

It will naturally here be expected of me, besides this brief historic review, to give some expression of my estimate, after a year's observation of the general character and influence of these services as they have developed through the progress of the year. And, if it was desired, I certainly should not on any occasion, be disposed to withhold my judgment in this matter, but here, in my own pulpit, at this time, I feel specially free so to do.

Aside from any direct and specific influence in the salvation of sinners and in inducing or perpetuating an increased interest in the church of Christ, of which we may speak,

there have been *indirect, genial and happy influences* emanating from this Hour of Prayer, and diffusing an holy fragrance through our assemblies, which should not be overlooked.

These might be called the *Amenities of the Union Prayer Meeting*, which though noiseless and to a great extent unnoticed, have not been without their happy tendency and effect.

The *Fact*, that as was said of the Apostles, *these all have continued with one accord in prayer and supplications for the space of a year*, is itself, peculiarly gratifying,—not only upon our family altars, not only upon the altars of our churches, but also upon this *Union* altar, the flame of holy sacrifice has been sustained. Brethren of the church of christ of every name have day by day, drawn near “with true hearts, in full assurance of faith,” and thrown the incense of pure praise and prayer upon it, so that it has not to this day, ceased to burn. It would be difficult to say, for none can know, what denomination of Christians have done most to minister to the life of this Altar Flame of our common Protestant Zion.

There has also been continually exerted the *happy influence of kind Christian association*, which continuing from day to day has at length begotten a mutual fraternal interest, which those who have experienced it, will not I am sure willingly soon let die.

And when we add to this the *general influence of a daily union of hearts in a common petition* for general blessings, and for those specific blessings of salvation and grace, for which our prayers have been incessantly requested by the People of God, sharing each others joys, interests and intercessions, bearing each others burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ, it is no wonder that associations of such a character have given to these meetings a deep and hallowed interest, and that the remembrances of them will always hereafter be pleasant to the soul.

They have also served to show how completely the *holy heart of the Church of Christ is one*. There have been earnest and faithful intercessions uttered by Brethren of almost all Christian names, and yet the whole Christian heart would and could and did most fervently respond “AMEN.” We have learned

by our own experience, that when we come nighest the cross and breathe most ardently our prayer to God, we are most alike, and that the things in which we differ are mainly the sandals and the out-of-door garments which we all lay aside, when we come into the presence of our common Lord. These may be mentioned as among the incidental Amenities, which we have no desire to pass unnoticed, and would not have forgotten. Those who have enjoyed them cannot forget them.

III.—ITS RESULTS.

And this will lead us to notice as among the immediate Tendencies and Results of these Union Services, *the relaxing and the gradual wearing away of that rigid sectarianism*, which has made the Church of Christ, the spouse of “one Lord,” sometimes, perhaps, less amiable and less lovely than she might have been. We would not in the least diminish any proper love, which any one may be cherishing for his own branch of the Christian Church, but we would, if possible, greatly increase that love which we bear to the whole of that Church which Jesus Christ loves. We would not love our own less but his great Flock more. Surely all whom He loves have a claim upon our hearts, and the measure of his affection, as to its subjects, may justly be the measure of ours. And, if we mistake not, this desired result has been in no small degree promoted by this daily Union of those belonging to different Fraternities of the Church of Christ, in one common service of Praise and Prayer.

Another important result, if we have rightly read the influence of these services, has been to awaken in the Church, a deeper sense of *its responsibility in its office of Intercession in the world*. Jesus Christ is the Great Intercessor for the Church. “*He ever liveth to make intercession for us.*”

“By Him our prayers acceptance gain
Although with sin defiled.”

But the Church is the great Intercessor with Him for a lost world. The world prays not for itself. It never did. It never will. “Alienated from the Life of God” it is content to

live in sin and die in its iniquity. It is the Intercession of the Church of Christ ascending to the Throne of the Highest through her Great Intercessor, which procures for that dying world the Gospel with all its Grace, the Holy Spirit with his Divine Light and Life, and all the Blessings of the Redemption of Jesus Christ. It is true, that all grace originates in the sovereign pleasure of God, but, in the Divine economy, the Intercession of the Church through its Head seems to be recognized as the instrumental antecedent to the dispensing of that grace. "*Yet I will be inquired of by the House of Israel to do for them.*"—EZEK. 36, 37. And it is for this purpose, He says in the text, "*I have set watchmen upon thy walls O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day nor night.*" And his command is, "*Keep not silence and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*" And to this Installation of the Church in the office of Intercession in the world, the Church responds, "*For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake will I not rest until the righteousness thereof shall go forth as brightness and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.*"—The Church thus installed as an Intercessor for a lost world has power with God in her office of Intercession because her Lord is upon the mediatorial throne and "*He ever liveth to make intercession.*"

Now that there has been awakened in the Church during the past year, a spirit of more earnest and importunate prayer and a deeper and more practical realization of the relation of the Church in its office of Intercession to the salvation of the world, and of its great and precious responsibility in that office, all will admit. One pleasing evidence of this awakening consciousness has been witnessed in these services by that flood of requests, daily presented, entreating the Intercession of the Church. These pathetic, earnest, importunate, and often repeated appeals for Prayer, have borne constant witness to the conviction of the Church of its own power of Intercession and have also by way of reaction, served greatly to vivify and deepen that conviction. That *the Prayer of the Church is Power with God for the salvation of the world*, is perhaps, the most im-

portant conviction that can this day, be aroused in the bosom of the Church. Through the agency of these services much has been done to develop and strengthen this conviction, and thus, as we believe, a great good has been accomplished, the fruits of which we trust, will be seen and felt in all time to come. The Church never loses a newly discovered or rather a newly developed truth. She never ceases to feel the influence of a newly awakened conviction. And if, during the past year, she has attained a vivid consciousness and a practical realization of her power with God in this respect, as we believe she has, it is an acquisition she will not willingly lose. Certainly, never have we seen the evidence of more earnest, importunate, often agonizing interest for the salvation of the Impenitent, than has been witnessed in those who have, from time to time, laid their petitions upon this Union altar. A precious memorial are these many Prayers, issuing from hearts divinely prompted, and laid up before God. They have ascended, not in vain, to the Hearer of Prayer. Their memorial is a holy fragrance before Him a pure incense from broken, contrite, spirit-inspired hearts. "The golden vials are full of odors, which are the prayers of Saints." The Bearer of the Golden Censer, ceases not to offer "much incense" of Praise "with the Prayers of all Saints upon the Golden Altar which is before the Throne and the smoke of the incense with the Prayers of the Saints ascends before God out of the Angel's hand." And my Brethren, if the answer to these Intercessions has not been manifestly granted, and if the blessing yet do "tarry," shall we not, according to the Divine direction "wait for it, since the promise still stands, "*"It will come and will not tarry."*

Another, and what we consider a very important result in its bearing upon the interests of the church, has been to develop and bring into action an immense amount of latent power among the Laity. There is power lying dormant within the church sufficient to shake the world. And could it be developed and wisely directed to the ends for which the Church exists, there is no computation that could estimate its influ-

nee. There is a deal of seasoned timber lying unused in the Church of Christ. Much of it is already honeycombed and useless. It is worthless except to bury or to burn. Now it is a happy thing to bring forth any thing that yet has life and service in it and put it to a profitable use, this has been done, some of the most prominently useful and honoured in the Christian activities of the past year, have been those whose influence was before scarcely felt in the church, they were indeed in full membership and may have brought no special reproach upon their profession, but as regarded the active responsibilities and the labours of Church membership, as regarded their usefulness in the Church and in the world, little can be said. Now to have brought into use this slumbering material, to have developed this latent energy is a great gain. Its influence is felt and will continue to be. The sadness here is, that there are so many in like slumberous condition still within the church; so many who seem to feel little interest in her prosperity or welfare, beyond securing her aid for their salvation. In order to this, they consent occasionally to attend her sacred assemblies, and perhaps to bestow a few paltry dollars for the support of her ordinances. Beyond this, they are not known or felt as followers of *Him* who said, "*whosoever denieth not himself, and taketh not up his cross, and cometh not after me cannot be my disciple.*"

These recent revival influencees have happily served to develop and bring into service much of this material that has been lying in comparatively useless preservation in the great lumber house of the church; of the rest, some may yet be put to good account for the glory of God in this world, another portion may be "saved so as by fire," while the remainder will be utterly consumed and its ashes swept away by the whirlwinds of the Day of Wrath.

And yet another result has been *to develop and greatly to quicken the interest of the Church in the salvation of the Impenitent.* This interest has been peculiarly manifested. Never, perhaps, has the heart of the Church, been more constantly and intently fixed upon the welfare of the Impenitent world than during this great awakening. This we regard as a happy

omen for the future. God never awakens the spirit of Prayer in his Church in a particular direction without meeting it in that line with special Grace. Great Blessings have already fallen upon the world in answer to these supplications, but as we believe, greater and more wonderful are still in reserve and to be poured upon us. The Lord grant it for his name's sake.

Greatly also have these services been blessed to the *recovery of the Backslidden, and to the quickening of the Divine Life among the faithful children of God.* I might mention many instructive facts that have come to my knowledge under this head, but it is not necessary, nor will time permit. Let it suffice to say, that this two-fold result has been constantly witnessed and has been to the Church among the most precious fruits of this gracious visitation from on High. A new impulse in the Divine Life has been received by many, the effects of which, already visible in holy living and holy labours, will be seen and felt while they live.

And many are there, some already entered upon the joys of the Blessed, who will thank God through unending years for these services of Prayer and Praise. Specific, and most delightful and encouraging instances of answer to prayer might here be mentioned, but there is no call for such publicity from this pulpit, and I will not detain you by the narration. God has graciously heard the importunities of his servants, and granted the salvation of many ready to perish and the quickened life, comfort and joy of his people. Thanks to his Holy Name, he has proved himself "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;*" not a God afar off but at hand, "*nigh to all them that call upon him in truth.*"

Such, my Brethren, are some of the results of our year of United Prayer. *A year of Prayer!* How delightful is the thought, and how pleasant is the review! All our churches having reaped the benefits of its happy influence and eternity alone can reveal its measure. This House of Prayer never had such a consecration, as it has received by this outpouring of the deepest utterances, of the holiest desires, of the most

mportunate, oftentimes agonizing cries of the spirit-moved children of God. It is become, indeed, a consecrated Bethel, where many a covenant Jacob has wrestled and prevailed; and should these services be closed and these prayers cease laily here to be offered, this House will be remembered, with many a hallowed association, by those of other Branches of the church of our common Lord through life, yea, and upon the Hills of the Zion of God on High. Ours has been the honour and privilege of extending a hearty welcome to these children of Prayer and Praise. A high honour is this conferred upon us, and a precious privilege. In *entertaining strangers we have entertained angels unawares.*

For this and all precious Blessings, through Jesus Christ our Lord bestowed upon us, of which we are all together unworthy, *Glory be unto the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost forever. AMEN.*

